

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK CARTER'S HOT PURSUIT

OR
ON THE TRACK OF AN ESCAPED CONVICT.



BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

THE FOREMOST OF THE ESCAPING CONVICTS TURNED AND FACED THE OTHERS. ATTACKING THEM WITH HIS FISTS AND DRIVING THEM BACK, IT WAS NICK CARTER HIMSELF.

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NICK CARTER'S HOT PURSUIT; OR, The Trick of an Escaped Convict.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

TWO ROGUES IN THE DARK.

light!

Carter, having just concluded an important case upon which he has been working for many days, is returning to his room, confessing to himself that he is tired and needs rest.

He has been "up and doing" four days in succession, and, now that his duties are over for the time being, he allows the natural fatigue which he feels to assert itself.

It is June, and the night is warm. A low rumble of thunder can be heard in the distance, and fitful flashes of lightning pierce the darkness that follows. The night is more profound.

Carter is walking rapidly. He is anxious to reach home before the rain bursts, and he feels that he must hurry to do so.

By a strange perversity, considering the fatigue that is upon him, and also the threatening storm, he prefers walking to riding, for the weariness is more of the brain than of the muscles.

He is in West Twenty-second street, not far from the North River front, in the city of New York.

He crosses an avenue, and passes beside a lumber yard, which occupies nearly the entire block; but as he reaches the very centre of the thoroughfare, longitudinally, the storm bursts upon him with sudden and unexpected fury.

The rain comes down in torrents, the wind howls, thunder crashes and roars, and lightning almost incessant plays about him.

The gateway to the lumber yard is open.

The flashes of vivid light reveal it as well as the sheltering piles of boards and planks beyond.

He turns with sudden decision, passes through the gate into the yard, reaches a huge pile of lumber, and rather enjoying the predicament in which he finds himself, crawls beneath the projecting boards, stretches out at full length where the rain cannot touch him, and waits for the storm to pass.

He has been there but a few moments—perhaps five—when a sudden flash of the electric currents of the air reveals two figures hastening toward him from the opening gateway.

They hurry forward, already drenched by the storm, and throw themselves beneath the lumber, less than ten feet from the spot where the detective is lying; but there is an intervening wall of boards which renders it impossible for them to see him even when the lightning illuminates the scene.

Habit of caution have become second nature to the detective, and so he remains silent, wondering, it is true, who and what the men are who are so close to him, and yet who have no suspicion of his proximity.

But he is destined to hear something startling; the parts of a plot which one may glean from a conversation between the two who are already familiar with every detail.

"Curse the rain!" growls one of the men, after securing the shelter of the boards. "I've tried three matches and I can't make one of them burn."

"What do you want of a match, Budge?" asks the other.

"Well, I don't want to eat it."

"Probably not."

"I want to light my pipe."

"Best not, Budge."

"Why?"

"Well, we want to talk, and we don't want anybody prying around us while we are at it."

"Bah! In this storm? There's nobody here, and nobody will come, either."

"Others may seek shelter here the same as ourselves."

"Bosh! I tell you, Jim, I opened that gate myself, less than twenty minutes ago. It is always kept closed at night."

"What of that?"

"Simply that nobody would come here for shelter who is not familiar with the place; and anybody who is familiar with it knows that the gate is kept closed; see?"

"Yes."

"Have you a match?"

"Yes."

"Pass one over; mine are wet."

In another moment the wind carries the odor of tobacco smoke to the detective's nostrils as he waits, listening intently to hear what more the men will have to say to each other.

Already he scents the presence of rognery, and ever upon the alert to do his duty as a man and a citizen as well as an officer, he resolves to hear all that takes place.

His fatigue is instantly forgotten, and his only thought is to hear what is said and to govern his actions accordingly.

One of the men having lighted his pipe, the other does the same, and several moments of silence ensue.

The one who has been addressed as Budge is the first to break the silence.

"Jim," he says, "is everything fixed yet?"

"No, not everything."

"It strikes me you're cursed slow with your part of the work."

"Great undertakings take time, Budge; and we have been waiting for you."

"You might just as well have gone ahead on the original plan," growls Budge.

"Why?"

"Because my end of it is a dead failure."

"A failure, Budge?"

"Yes—total."

Jim utters an oath, and for a moment another silence follows.

"Tell me about it," says Jim, presently.

"There's mighty little to tell."

"Well, give me what there is."

"I've spent pretty nearly three weeks in that infernal town, and I haven't accomplished a thing."

"I'm afraid you didn't go to work in the right way."

"You try it, that's all."

"Could you get in at all?"

"Yes, on visiting days, and once or twice to see 'Cousin Tom.' "

His use of the expression "Cousin Tom" suggests to the mind of the listening detective that the name is used in irony and not to signify a relative.

"Did you talk with Tom?" asks Jim.

"Yes; but always with one of the confounded guards standing over us. Billy Piper; you know him."

"I should think so."

"I think the cuss more than half tumbled to me."

"Bah!"

"Bah all you please! Billy's no slouch."

"True; he's a good fellow, though, for a guard."

"Right enough. All the same, it was owing to him that I couldn't get a half-dozen words with Tom that he didn't hear."

"How much did you manage to say?"

"Well, I gave Tom to understand that there was a scheme afoot; that you, Jack Lawless, and——"

"Hush! no names."

"Oh, blast your caution! However, that you, Jack and Polly were in it."

"Well?"

"There isn't any 'well' in the sense you use it."

"Why?"

"Simply because I said just enough to make poor Tom crazy with curiosity, which I couldn't satisfy."

"He played sick?"

"Certainly."

"And you could not——"

"Curse it! Haven't I told you that Billy Piper stood over us like a spectre the whole time?"

"How about visiting days?"

"Well, I managed to drop a word to several of the boys here and there, but only enough to set them to thinking and wondering."

"Too bad, Budge."

"Yes; the scheme is an utter failure so far as that part of it is concerned."

"It won't work without that end of it."

"Then we'll have to give it up."

"Oh, no; not yet, Budge!"

"Well, Jim, you always had brains for planning things. If you've got another scheme, out with it. You know that I'm with you, whatever it is."

"Do you mean that?"

"Mean what?"

"That you are with me whatever the scheme may be?"

"Yes."

"Then I know one that will work."

"Sure?"

"Certain."

"What is it?"

"It involves a great sacrifice on your part, Budge."

"I'm ready."

"Not so fast, old man; you haven't heard me out yet."

"I tell you I'm ready whatever it is, if it will carry through the plans we outlined a month ago."

"It will, sure!"

"Even——"

"Confound it! speak out!"

"Wait. Even to the extent of giving up your liberty for a time?"

"Eh?"

"Does that startle you?"

"I don't catch on."

"How do you like prison fare?"

"What are you getting at, anyhow?"

"This: would you, for the sake of assuring the success of our plans, consent to be sent to Sing Sing for——"

"What! sent way to that infernal jug? No! by all the thunders, no!"

"I was afraid you would not, even though you said you were in it, no matter——"

"Say, Jim, do you mean it?"

"Certainly."

"Do you mean that I'm to be arrested, tried, convicted, and sent to 'Sing Sing' twice, and—say! by the great chat-in-wh Bootem-street, you're asking too much."

"I thought so."

Another silence follows, and presently Budge speaks again.

"Jim," he says.

"Well?"

"Just begin at chapter one-eye, and tell me the whole story. When I catch on better, I can tell better what I will do and what I won't do; see?"

CHAPTER II.

AN UNHEARD-OF VENTURE.

Jim does not at once respond to the request of his companion. He seems to be thinking over the pros and cons of the proposition he is about to make, so that there may be no mistake in the affair when it is once launched.

"We have both seen the inside of Sing Sing, Budge," he says, presently.

"I reckon we have."

"We were there together."

"Yes."

"Therefore you know that I know what a man faces when he consents to go there voluntarily."

"Sure?"

"I speak of this so you will remember that I thoroughly know what I am talking about."

"Oh, confound it! Come to the point."

"Don't be impatient, Budge. This is the most serious undertaking of our lives. don't forget that."

"I won't. Go on."

"Suppose you were arrested and charged with forgery?"

rested, "Well, it wouldn't be the first time."
 "Sing "Certainly not. All the more reason
 chat-in why your conviction would be certain."

much. "Ugh! Go on."

resently "You might as well have the game as
 the name, and, therefore, with the cer-
 tainty that you are to be caught and sent
 up, you might as well make a good haul."

"Well?"

eye, and "Suppose you write somebody's name
 catch on at the bottom of a check, secure a good
 will do round sum——"

"How much?"

"Ten or fifteen thousand."

"Easier said than done."

e. "Easily done, Budge, with me to tell
 o the re you how."

"Well; what next?"

ms to b "When you get the money in your fist,
 s of th knowing you are to be caught, you pass
 , so tha it over to me——"

he affa "That's nice—for you."

of Sin "To be used in the general fund,
 Budge. You know me well enough to
 know that I'll stick by you."

"Sure! go on."

ow wha to Sing Sing for a term of years—say
 go ther five."

"Beautiful!" with withering sarcasm.

remembe But Jim continues, apparently uncon-
 am talk scious of the interruption.

e point. "Once inside the prison walls, the task
 This which you have just failed to accomplish
 ur lives will be easy."

"That's so."

ed an "Every man we want can be notified.
 Nobody knows how to do that better than
 you."

"Sure!"

"The only difference between this and

the former plan is that you are in limbo
 with the others."

"I begin to catch on."

"I will leave you there a month before
 I make a move. Then I, or somebody,
 will visit the prison. Suppose I do that
 act?"

"Well?"

"I will see you, but I will not speak to
 you."

"Certainly not."

"If your work is done so that every-
 thing is in readiness, you will give me a
 signal."

"What?"

"We'll arrange that later. I want to
 think it over."

"Well?"

"If you want more time, you will give
 a different signal. We will have one for
 'All right;' one for 'Give me another
 week,' 'Another month,' and so on. In
 short, we will fix up a perfect code, so
 that we will understand each other, al-
 though twenty to fifty feet apart, and
 though a thousand Billy Pipers stand at
 our elbows, they will be none the wiser."

"Capital! I begin to feel some enthusi-
 asm."

"According to our signals we will
 work; you on the inside, I on the out-
 side."

"I see."

"In that way there can be no mistakes,
 and we must succeed."

"You bet, Jim."

"When the fruit is ripe and ready to
 pick——"

"We'll pick it."

"That's the way to talk."

"I begin to like the idea."

"At the most, you will not be in limbo over two months."

"I don't care if it's three, or even four."

"Two will do it, sure; and I think one will."

"It ought to."

"You will have plenty of time to make every point."

"Yes."

"Tom knows enough now so that he will catch on quick enough, and when he once gets posted about the whole lay-out, he can help you fix the others. How does he stand with the guards?"

"Oh, he's way up; regular goody-goody chap."

"Better and better. You must follow the same course."

"Right!"

"Before you go up, I will make a list of the men we want, and you must confine your work to them."

"Take no others?"

"Not one."

"Perhaps I can't help it."

"If you cannot help it, why you cannot; but don't do it unless you are obliged to."

"All right."

"Mind one point, Budge."

"What?"

"Be wary of new men."

"Sure!"

"Particularly short-term men."

"You bet!"

"Anything over five years, if you like his looks, will go, unless his time is most out."

"I see."

"All those details had best be left to

your judgment, for you can tell better when you are on the ground than I can advise you here."

"Sure!"

"Remember one thing, however."

"Give it out."

"That you stake your own liberty on this thing. If you fail, you are there, and it keeps, until your time expires, so free for yourself depends upon your own astuteness, coolness, daring and initiative. Do you think you can do it?"

"I'll take the risk."

"Good! I would do it myself, if I were there——"

"What's the use of talking like that? You've got to be outside, or we might as well drop the whole thing."

"I thought you might think I was afraid——"

"Afraid! You! Say, Jim, was there ever anything, any man, any devil that you feared?"

Jim laughs in a low tone as his friend asks the question.

"No," he replies. "I never felt fear yet, because I never met a man whom I could not handle easily."

"It's funny, too," muses Budge, alone.

"Why?"

"Because you don't look so infernally muscular. Anybody with half an eye would see that I could tie you up in a knot; and yet I'm a perfect baby in your hands."

"It's a gift, Budge. Great muscular strength does not consist in gigantic proportions. It comes down to us from our ancestors."

"Say!"

"Well?"

"About that check?"

"What about it?"

"When will we spring it?"

"Oh, in a day or two!"

"So soon?"

"Yes; just as soon as our plans are perfected. When we have once settled upon what we are to do, there is no use in delay."

"Sure!"

"The quicker we get to work, the sooner we will get through."

"How much shall we make it?"

"A good round sum, Budge. We will need money, and it is a good way to get it. In doing this thing you will serve two purposes. It will be you who provides our scheme with funds, and you who will make its success an established fact."

"You planned it all?"

"Even so, Budge, the general may get the glory, but it is the soldier who deserves it."

"Who are you going to strike?"

"On the check question?"

"Yes."

"One of two men; I have not yet decided."

"Who are they?"

"I am not sure, but that now. Time enough, against the night."

"I think not, Budge, it puzzles me, though."

"Jim was just as easy to forge as it is for ten or twenty."

"Never."

Nick then related the whole story, and then he was gone, as he had said, in a flash, eh?"

"Just leave that to me, Budge; I will arrange it all."

"By thunder, Jim, I wish I had a little of your brain!" exclaims Budge, with genuine admiration.

Jim laughs.

"In that case," he says, "I would not have so much, and I need it all just now."

"That's so."

"Never mind the brain, Budge; when you get out of Sing Sing you will have a fortune and so will I; and then——"

"Then for the other plan, in which nobody but Jim and Budge are interested."

"Exactly."

"That's what catches me. By thunder, I think I'd do five years without a murmur if I was dead sure of the success of that scheme afterward."

"Would you? I'm not sure that I would," and Jim laughed again.

To the listening detective, there is something familiar in that low laugh, but he cannot place it.

"The rain has ceased," continues Jim, presently. "You had better skip out, Budge; we must not be seen together."

"You go first; I want to lock the gate."

"Never mind the gate. Good-night."

"When do I see you again, Jim?"

"I will let you know."

"All right. So long."

Budge hurries rapidly away, leaving Jim alone, or seemingly so, in the lumber pile.

"Poor fool!" he says, presently.

Then he also leaves the shelter, and starts away through the darkness.

But he does not go alone, for Nick Carter is upon his trail.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW WRINKLE IN CRIME.

When the man who had been called Jim during the conversation which the detective had so strangely overheard reached the street he paused suddenly and waited.

Nick Carter was yet in the lumber yard, and he kept well in the shadow so that if perchance the ex-convict—for such he doubtless was—should look around he would not discover that he had been spied upon.

Jim waited several moments, standing motionless the while, but whether he was expecting any one or not the detective could not tell.

Presently he moved away, walking slowly toward the east, but stopping every few paces and turning full around to inspect the street behind him.

"Is he looking to see if he is followed?" muttered the detective, "or is he expecting somebody else besides Budge to meet him to-night?"

He passed Ninth avenue and then Eighth, traversing the distance in the same manner, pausing at frequent intervals to look behind him, and walking leisurely all the way.

The storm had entirely ceased. The streets were wet and the gutters were full of water, but otherwise all evidence of the storm had passed.

The detective had great difficulty to avoid being seen by the man he was fol-

lowing, for the constant turning and looking around rendered the task of shadowing a difficult one.

To have Jim suspect that he was followed would suggest to him that the conversation in the lumber pile had been overheard, and the detective wished to avoid that above all things.

The consequence was that Nick altered his appearance several times as he followed his man through the street, and therefore Jim, who doubtless saw him often when he looked back, could not suspect that he was the same man.

Jim continued along Twenty-second street until Broadway was reached.

There he turned abruptly, crossed that great thoroughfare diagonally to Twenty-third street, and hastened eastward again.

When he arrived at the corner of Third avenue the detective was about twenty rods behind him.

He saw Jim turn the corner of Third avenue toward the south, and he hastened forward in order not to lose sight of him, for he was confident that the man was near his stopping-place.

But when Nick reached the corner the fellow had disappeared.

Nick paused in doubt how next to proceed.

That Jim had darted into a safe an eye near by he could not swear that I could were a dozen different ones yet I'm a pe he might have gone, and had no means of determining. Great muscular the one used by the man in gigantic power. lowing.

It must be remembered that the night was very dark. The detective had been

at the man whom he knew to be plotting some desperate crime.

It is true he had many times passed beneath electric lights, but at such times his back had been toward Nick, for he had taken care not to pause and look around except when he was in the shadow.

"One thing is certain," mused the detective, "the fellow entered a doorway close to Third avenue, else he would have continued through Twenty-second street instead of coming up to Twenty-third.

"I do not think he suspected that he was followed, but adopted those tactics only from habits of caution.

"Now, what is the next thing to do?"

He spent several moments in deep thought, then turned abruptly on his heel and hastened homeward.

"Pshaw!" he muttered; "it is time that I learned to attend to my own business. Those fellows were plotting something in which the State Prison at Sing Sing is to play a prominent part. I'll just send a note to Warden Brown, giving him all the information I have secured, and let it go at that."

On the following morning at the breakfast table the detective mentioned the affair of the preceding night to his chief assistant.

"Chick," he said, "did you ever run against the name 'Budge?' "

"I think not."

"Jim was another name. Try and think if you have heard those names associated in a way that you can remember."

"Never."

Nick then related the incident in detail.

"There's a plot there somewhere," he said, in conclusion.

"Certain."

"What is your idea of it, Chick?"

"Prison breaking," was the laconic answer.

"No doubt of that, but there is something more connected with it."

"Perhaps."

"Must be; they spoke of making a fortune, and they would have to do something aside from the mere escape from limbo; eh?"

"Sure."

"The man 'Jim' was simply engaged in making a tool of 'Budge,' no doubt of that."

"Well?"

"Humph! Nothing more. Are you busy to-day, Chick?"

"Rather. Miss Jones and I are busy putting the finishing touches on that forgery case. It's a simple matter, and we will get through to-day. Tell you what, Nick!"

"Well?"

"Ida Jones is the shrewdest woman I ever knew."

"Yes?"

"She has done two-thirds of the fine work in this matter, and I've let her do it."

"Right, lad."

"She just guesses, and then follows up the guess, and I'm blowed if she don't guess right every time."

"Good!"

Chick lighted a cigar, and leaned back in his chair.

"I'm off in ten minutes," he said; "any orders?"

"No. I have nothing on hand to-day, and so I will run up to Sing Sing and see Brown."

"Back to-night?"

"I think so."

"Well, good luck to you."

The assistant took his departure. Twenty minutes later Nick Carter was on his way to the depot, and in due time he was sitting in the private office of Warden Brown at Sing Sing prison.

As tersely as possible the detective related all that had occurred the preceding night, ending with the remark:

"Warden, I am convinced that a determined effort is to be made to liberate some of your prisoners; I am also satisfied that the thing is being planned by a man of brains, who has carefully calculated every step and provided for it."

"It has that look, certainly."

"I thought I'd warn you and so give you a chance to meet the scoundrels half way."

"It is very kind of you, Carter, and I appreciate it; but as for breaking prison at Sing Sing, why the thing is impossible."

"My dear warden," replied Nick, slowly, "the thing that was impossible yesterday becomes only improbable to-day, and an established fact to-morrow."

"With exceptions, Nick."

"Such as——"

"Escaping from Sing Sing."

"Perhaps so; I hope so."

"I hope you won't think that I am unappreciative of——"

"Certainly not. Do you recognize the name 'Cousin Tom,' or 'Tom,' in connection with this affair?"

"No."

"The man Budge was evidently here, and, no doubt, visited the prison several times."

"It would seem so."

"The prisoner to whom he referred as 'Cousin Tom' is——"

"My meat if I can nail him."

"That's it!"

Every convict is known in the prison by a number, but a very careful description of them all is kept in the records, and the true name, if it is known, is entered.

The warden and Nick examined the records carefully, but although they found many "Toms" and "Thomases" there was no means of ascertaining which one Budge had referred to.

"Has one thing occurred to you?" asked the warden, presently.

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose that those men, Jim Budge, were 'onto' you when you entered the lumber yard?"

"Well?"

"Suppose they saw you go in, knew who you were, followed and held the card fab purposely for you to hear it?"

"Well?"

"That's all; you can guess the remainder of the suppositions under that head."

"It won't work, warden."

"Why not?"

"Well, I know they did not see me, the first place, and in the second, what object could they have in view?"

"A hoax, or a desire to draw your attention from——"

"It won't work."

"Well, I'll keep awake up here."

"I hope so. Depend upon it, you will hear of a forgery before long; the forger will be arrested, and sent here, and the man will be Budge."

"It may be so."

"It will be."

"Anyhow, I can watch him if he does come; nothing is to be done till then."

"Unless they change their plans."

"Do you think they are likely to do that?"

"No, I do not."

"Nick, if this fellow Budge comes here, as you predict, I will send for him and we will talk this matter over again."

until then we'll take it easy. Dinner is ready now, and you must dine with me. This is a new wrinkle in criminal lore, a man to come here and tell me the story of a crime before it is committed. Enterome."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BIG FORGERY.

Just seven days later than the events recorded in the preceding chapter, Nick Carter and his assistant, Chick, were again at the breakfast table, and each had a newspaper spread open before him. Both were reading earnestly and neither broke the silence for some time.

Presently Nick threw aside his paper. "Read it through, Chick?" he asked. "Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

"Why, it's the same case."

"No doubt of that."

"To-morrow morning we'll hear that the forger has been arrested, and the fellow will be your man of the lumber pile, and, whudge."

"Sure to."

"They made quite a haul, didn't they?"

"Yes; got away with the cash. I'm puzzled in the same manner that Jim puzzled Budge."

"How?"

"Like him, I say it is as easy to forge a check for twelve thousand five hundred dollars as for less, but it's a great deal more difficult to get the check cashed."

"But this paper explains it."

"So does this one. It says that the check was presented at the bank upon which it was drawn for certification only."

"Well, it was easy enough to get it cashed after that."

"I don't think so."

"Why?"

"No matter how thoroughly a check may be certified the man who seeks to draw the money must be identified by somebody who is known at the bank that cashes it."

"Certainly, but that——"

"Is also explained, eh?"

"Why, yes."

"Chick, it may be all right, but it looks shady."

"Humph! I don't see it; oh!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I just caught on to your meaning."

"Perhaps I'm right, and perhaps I'm wrong; time will show."

A silence ensued which was broken only by the advent of Patsy.

He laid a card upon the table before the detective, which bore the name of Simon Duncan, president of the Gotham National Bank of New York city.

Nick smiled as he tossed the card to his assistant and rose to leave the room.

"Got it, haven't you?" murmured Chick.

"Seems so. Patsy, tell the gentleman that I will be down presently."

"Yes, sir."

"Chick."

"Well?"

"Come to the study with me."

"Right."

A moment later the two detectives were in the study together, and the wardrobe was open before them.

"What next?" asked Chick.

"You're to play Nick Carter in this case, lad."

"Oh!"

"Put on the 'Old Thunderbolt' rig. I'll make up something, and then we'll interview the bank president."

"Yes, but——"

"You're to be Nick Carter, and I'm to be the assistant. You will do the talking and I the listening."

In ten minutes they were ready, and they proceeded at once to the reception-

room, where Mr. Duncan was awaiting them.

"Which of you is Nick Carter?" asked Simon Duncan when they entered.

"I," replied Chick; "this is my assistant, whom I prefer to have present, if you do not object."

"Certainly not."

"I have read the papers, Mr Duncan, and I am therefore already informed as to your business with me."

"Ah!"

"Rather a serious matter, that forgery."

"I should say so. Will you take the case?"

"Certainly. I am surprised though that you did not go to the Central office."

"The Central office has the case in hand, sir, but I am determined to catch that forger, if possible."

"Quite right."

"The bank will pay you for your trouble whether you succeed or not."

"Very well; now tell me the story."

"You say you have read the papers this morning?"

"Yes."

"What ones?"

"The Herald and World."

"Then you have the story."

"The paper tells me that the man who secured the money was named Benjamin Farrel."

"Yes."

"And that he was identified by Judson Leonard."

"Yes."

Who is Judson Leonard?"

One of our depositors."

A rich man?"

"No, I think not particularly."

"How large does he keep his balance with you?"

"Usually about five thousand dollars, I believe."

"He is well known at the bank, I trust?"

"Oh, yes. That is, he was thoroughly well introduced."

"How long has he been a depositor?"

"About two or three months."

"Ah! who introduced Mr. Leonard?"

"The fact is I met him at the club, where he was a new member. We became friends, and one day he expressed the wish to open an account with us. I was, of course, glad to have him do so——"

"So he was not introduced at the bank after all?"

"My club is very select, sir. I hope your questions do not imply any reflections upon Mr. Leonard, for——"

"Go on, please."

"I was about to say that I look upon him as a personal friend, that he is a constant visitor at my house, and is, in fact—er—as far above suspicion—er—as——"

"As yourself."

"Exactly that."

"I do not doubt it, Mr. Duncan, but an ugly fact stares us in the face."

"What?"

"That he introduced a forger to you."

"Oh, he explains that perfectly. I will tell you what he says, and——"

"Wait, please. I gather from what you say that Mr. Leonard is now as anxious to find and apprehend the forger as you are."

"Every bit."

"Then he will be willing to talk with me."

"He'll be glad to do so. Indeed, he offered to come here with me."

"Ah! very kind of him. Where can I see him, and at what time?"

"At the bank, at any hour you may select."

"Very good; say at eleven this morning."

"He will be there."

"Thank you. Who first suggested the employment of your humble servant?"

"Of whom?"

"Nick Carter."

"Why, it was Judson."

"Judson! Oh, Mr. Leonard?"

"Yes."

"I take it that you are quite intimate with him."

"We are close friends, sir."

"Of three months standing, eh?"

"Sir, this is the second time that your words have implied a reflection upon my——"

"Excuse me. I imply nothing. I suspect everybody and nobody. I am a detective. I do not want your case; take it elsewhere."

"But—oh, confound it! I want you to take it. My indignation was simply loyalty to a friend. You can excuse that, I suppose, Mr. Carter?"

"Certainly."

"Will you be at the bank at eleven?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go."

"Wait; a few more questions first."

"Very good."

"The gentleman whose name was forged was George J. Mackeye, I believe."

"Yes."

"Why, when Farrel presented the check for certification, did he not take the cash instead?"

"Because there was no one there to identify him."

"Tell me what occurred when Farrel first appeared?"

"He went to the paying teller, and presented a check bearing a perfect copy of Mackeye's signature."

"Well? and then——"

"The teller, of course, declined to cash it."

"What time was that?"

"About one yesterday afternoon."

"Continue."

"Have you anybody to identify you, Mr. Farrel?" asked the teller.

"No," was the reply.

"Then," continued the teller, 'all that I can do for you is to certify the check.'

"Thank you," replied Farrel; 'if you will do that I will find somebody who knows me, and I will not be obliged to return here.'

"The teller certified the check, and the forger went away."

"At ten minutes before three——"

"That is ten minutes before the bank closes."

"Exactly. At that time Farrel came in again accompanied by Judson Leonard."

"They walked to the window together, and Farrel exclaimed:

"I have come back here with the check after all. Here is a gentleman who has known me a great many years, who will identify me."

"Do you know Mr. Benjamin Farrel, Mr. Leonard?" asked the teller.

"Perfectly well," replied Leonard. 'I know he is Benjamin Farrel, but I know nothing about the check he wishes cashed.'

"Did he say that?"

"Yes—jokingly, of course—nevertheless, he said it."

"Oh, the check is all right," replied the teller. 'How will you have the money, Mr. Farrel?'

"How did he take it?"

"In small bills; that is, tens, twenties, and fifties."

"Ah! How did he carry the money when he went away?"

"In a newspaper, wrapped up and tied with a string. Now you must see Leonard, and hear what he has to say."

CHAPTER V.

PLAYING A DEEP GAME.

At eleven o'clock Nick Carter and Chick were at the bank of which Simon Duncan was the president.

They were still attired as they had been during the interview at Nick's house, Chick representing the great detective, and Nick the assistant.

They were shown at once to the president's room, where they found Mr. Duncan, and with him a slight, dark, handsome man, faultlessly dressed, and with exquisite manners, who was presented to them as Mr. Leonard.

"We will get to business at once, gentlemen," said Chick, who, as before, did the talking.

"Certainly."

"Mr. Leonard, I believe you are the gentleman who identified Benjamin Farrel, are you not?"

"I am."

"Why did you do so?"

"Because he asked me if I would. I had known him a long time, and——"

"How long?"

"We were schoolmates."

"Where?"

"In Havana, N. Y."

"How long ago?"

"Twenty years or more."

"Have you met since you parted there?"

"Frequently."

"Where?"

"In various places; several times in New York and—but really I can't remember. Our meetings were always accidental."

"You are sure that you were not deceived?"

"About what?"

"Regarding his identity with your former schoolmate?"

"Certainly."

"What is Mr. Farrel's business?"

"I don't know."

"Eh?"

"I never asked him. We weren't particularly cordial; I never liked him, and he never liked me. I always knew that his conscience was elastic—well, you know, he wasn't my sort."

"That is why you made the remark about the check, I suppose."

"What remark?"

"You told the teller when you identified Farrel that you knew nothing about the check."

"So I did; I had forgotten that."

"H'm! When did you leave Havana, Mr. Leonard?"

"When I was twenty-one."

"When did Farrel leave there?"

"I don't know—afterward, I think."

"Knowing him so well, can you give me any point regarding his general appearance that will aid me in catching him?"

"No; I'm afraid not. He is about my height, but heavier—much heavier. When I saw him yesterday he wore a mustache, but no beard. His hair and mustache are of the ordinary brown, and——"

"He's a sort of nondescript, eh?"

"Precisely."

"It would not be a bad idea for you to keep an eye out for him, Mr. Leonard. You might see him, and——"

"If I do he won't be free long."

"Good. Mr. Duncan, when did you find out that the check was a forgery?"

"About thirty minutes after the forger got away with the cash."

"Tell me how."

"Mackeye, whose check we supposed it was, had an appointment at the bank with me at three-thirty."

"Ah!"

"The teller was in my room here, when Mackeye came in, and he made some remark about having certified and cashed a check of his but a few moments before."

"How much?" demanded Mackeye.

"The teller told the amount, and then Mr. Mackeye, looking very solemn, as well he might, said:

"I have drawn no such check as that you describe."

"I won't weary you with the details, but I speedily became satisfied that the

check was a forgery, and, of course, the of your task; however, if you say so it goes."

"I do."

"You want five years, eh?"

"Yes."

"Regular?"

"Sure. You may let the district attorney into the secret, of course, because the indictment will have to be drawn, but nobody else need know."

"Then nobody but the district attorney and myself outside are to know that you are not a genuine, dyed-in-the-wool burglar."

"That's it."

"Nick, suppose we should have a violent thunder-storm."

"Well?"

"And I should be struck by lightning."

"Yes."

"And an epidemic of cholera should strike the city."

"Well?"

"And carry Nicoll off?"

"I see."

"You'd be in for five years 'whedder 'r no,' as the coon said."

Nick laughed.

"I'll take my chances of convincing Warden Brown of my identity if two such calamities should occur," he said.

"You insist, then?"

"Certainly."

"All right; when do you want me to arrest you?"

"I'll let you know."

"Very good."

"When this fellow Budge is taken I'll adopt a make-up that will——"

"My dear fellow, what good will a make-up do you when you get into the hands of Warden Brown?"

"Lots."

"I don't see it."

"I can adopt one through which he

will not recognize me, and which he won't be able to wash off, either."

"All right, Nick," laughed the superintendent of police, "I have learned not to argue these points with you, and not to dispute you. Let me know when you are ready, and I'll undertake to land you in Sing Sing in short order."

Then Nick took his leave.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO CONVICTS.

The detective's prediction was verified.

Within twenty-four hours of the time when Nick Carter had the interview with President Duncan at the bank, the man who was known as Benjamin Farrel was arrested.

He was identified at once by the teller, the other clerks of the bank who had seen him on the day when he presented the check, and by Judson Leonard.

After what seemed to be a stubborn denial, which lasted a few hours, he broke down and confessed the forgery, but refused point-blank to tell what he had done with the money.

When pressed to tell where the cash could be found he said:

"I have hidden it. You'll send me up the river for just as many years if I tell you where it is, as you will if I don't."

That is all he could be induced to say and neither promises nor threats could extract any further information from him.

His case was so well known and he was so easily proven that no time was wasted in bringing the matter before the grand jury.

He was indicted, and the day finally came for him to plead to the indictment.

When he was taken from the Tombs to the court-house there were several other prisoners in the "Black Maria," and among them was one whose spirits seemed

in no wise dampened by the predicament in which he found himself.

"I'm doing a tour of the States," he said to Budge, as they were on their way to the court-house.

"Eh?" said Budge.

"Don't ketch on, hey?"

"No."

"I'm tryin' to find out which State gives one the best grub."

"Oh!"

"I've tried Joliet, Jefferson City—but what's the use of naming them? This will make the seventh."

"What are you up for?"

"Cracking a crib."

"Oh! Going to stand trial?"

"'Twouldn't do no good."

"Why?"

"I was caught in the act; see?"

"Yes."

"My pal got away. He and I have worked together a long time. He'll take my share to our hiding-place, and I'll find it there when I get out if it's ten years."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"Sure! Why, I'm just as sure of it as I am that I'm booked for five years certain."

"Then he's an uncommonly good pal to have."

"Humph! He wouldn't cheat me out of a cent, nor I him. We're on the square with each other."

"That's nice."

"I say, old chap, what are you answering to to-day; eh?"

"Forgery."

"Oh! Stand trial?"

"No; my fix is the same as yours."

"Plead, eh?"

"Yes."

"Dead sure for five years, eh?"

"Yes; or more."

"Let's hang together; what do you say?"

"I'll think it over."

"Correct. When you get throughon't for thinking I'll tell you something."

"What?"

"You aren't through thinking yet."

"Perhaps what you've got to say will help me."

"Well, I don't mind letting you in. You look like a square chap, but you may as well know that I don't give this snap to everybody."

"What is it?"

"I've got a little scheme for talking with the boys that beats all the gumbos you ever saw."

Budge's face brightened perceptibly, then it fell again.

"You can't use it," he said, "unless the other fellows know the thing as well as you."

"Bah!" replied the burglar, who, as the reader has already suspected, was Nick Carter; "I never was in a prison yet where I couldn't teach all hands the secret in less than a week. But I keep it for the good fellows. None of the splitters can get onto it, you bet."

"Will you teach it to me?"

"That depends on the way in which you finish that thinking you set out to do a moment ago."

"I have finished."

"Good! What's the verdict?"

"We'll be pals if you say so."

"Agreed."

"We're both bound to go up."

"Sure!"

"To Sing Sing."

"Certain."

The conversation above recorded had been carried on in a low tone, which gradually sunk to a whisper, so that the other occupants of the Black Maria could hear no word that was said.

"Maybe I'll let you into something of mine by and by," said Budge.

"No time like the present."

"Yes, there will be a better time."

hrough "Don't forget. Now, when will you teach me that thing of yours?"

et." "After we're sentenced; before we get to Sing-twice."

ay will "All right. Here we are at the court-house. Don't forget."

ou in. "Forget! Me! I! Not much! I ain't got no guilt that way! Whatever Happy Hal is snap says goes!"

"Is that your cog?"

alking "Yes; Happy Hal. I've got thirty or forty others, but to my friends I'm Happy Hal. Who're you?"

"Budge."

ptibly, "Correct. We're pals from this out. We'll lay in together for keeps, and if unless you're made of the stuff I think you are, as well Sing Sing won't hold us long."

"Count on me!"

ho, as They had no more time in which to exchange confidences.

in yet The Black Maria came to a halt, and they were led to the court-room to plead to the indictments against them.

litters Both pleaded guilty, and by the lawyers assigned to defend them were recommended to the mercy of the court.

which But the evidence was very strong against both.

to do Benjamin Farrel was sentenced to seven years and six months at hard labor, and Henry Dodge, alias Happy Hal, to five years.

Then they were taken away.

They could not be sent to Sing Sing until the following day, and then they were handcuffed together for the journey.

Bit by bit the detective instructed Budge in the secret way of communication that, after careful study, he had invented for the occasion.

It was very ingenious, and at the same time so simple that Budge could not help wondering why convicts had never thought of it before.

But they never had, and he could not help admitting that it was much better

and simpler than anything of the kind before devised.

To describe it in detail would occupy too much space for the purposes of our story. Suffice it to say that certain motions of the body, hands, and feet conveyed letters and syllables, the motions in themselves being so slight as not to attract the attention of the guard or of an uninitiated convict, yet they were perfectly adequate to convey the intended meaning to one who understood them.

Sing Sing was reached at last, and the two prisoners were delivered to the prison officials.

They were entered in the records as follows:

"Benjamin Farrel."

Then followed the date of his reception at the prison, date of sentence, length of term to serve, etc., etc.

Continuing, it read:

"Born, won't say. Age, 38. Occupation, forger and thief. Complexion, light. Eyes, blue. Hair, light brown. Stature, 5 feet 10 1-2 inches. Weight, 182 pounds. Can read and write. Uses tobacco. Catholic. Single. Residence, unknown. Has wart on back of neck. Mole on back of right hand, near middle knuckle joint. Low, broad, projecting forehead. Eyes, full and very wide apart. Eyebrows, darker than hair. Large nose, slightly crooked. Nostrils small. Upper lip long. Teeth even and white. Chin recedes a little. Short neck. Carries head little to one side. Has habit of moving lips involuntarily, as though talking to himself. Face, pleasant. Hands, broad and muscular. Feet, large. Little toe of right foot has been flattened so that nail grows sideways."

The above description is given here in order that the reader may know how minute are the descriptions of convicts.

No point, however trivial, is neglected, and in the event of an escape it is made

a most difficult matter for the convict to avoid being retaken.

Few of the readers of this library can realize the difficulties that lie in the way of escape from State prisons.

Suppose a convict succeeds in reaching the world without the stone walls of his prison, his freedom is not attained, and will not be, until he has concealed the closely cropped hair, the smoothly shaven face, the strange pallor of the skin, unlike any other, that is produced by prison life; he must rid himself of the striped clothing, and secure in its place outer garments which cannot expose him at any moment; he must conceal the moles, warts, bent fingers, uneven teeth, narrow nostrils, shuffling gait, and in short root out and cast aside every peculiarity which nature gave him—and he finds he cannot. They are the leopard spots which nature gave to human kind, and as unchangeable as the genuine article.

All the escaped convict can do is to hide until the fickle world outside the prison wall has forgotten him, unless, like the other prisoner of that day with Benjamin Farrel, like Henry Dodge, alias Happy Hal, alias (to us, reader) Nick Carter, his description is somewhat as follows:

"Born in New York. Age, 36. Occupation, carpenter. Complexion, neither light nor dark. Hair, brown. Eyes, gray. Height, 5 feet 9 inches. No distinguishing marks of any kind. Figure perfect and very muscular. Voice soft and musical. Face handsome."

A description that will answer for nine men out of ten is difficult to localize. A description which points out many peculiarities renders identification an easy task.

However, the two prisoners were entered, and became convicts. They went through the usual routine, and in a day or two were "old stories."

CHAPTER VII.

SIGNAL TALKING.

Even Warden Brown did not suspect that the burglar who was known and convicted as Happy Hal was Nick Carter.

He did, however, remember his conversation with the famous detective regarding the forger who would be "sent up" and he interviewed Budge very closely.

"What is your real name?" he asked of the forger.

"Benjamin Farrel."

"How many other names have you?"

"No others."

"Bah! Aren't you sometimes called Budge?"

The face of the forger remained immovable.

"Never," he replied.

"I think you have been here before."

"You ought to know if I have," was the cool reply.

It was a self-evident truth, and caused the warden to change his tactics.

He was about to question Budge more closely, following the cues that had been given him by Nick Carter, when another prisoner who was standing near the burglar, Happy Hal—interrupted him with a coarse laugh.

"Excuse me, warden," he hastened to say when the official scowled at him. "your questions reminded me of something."

"Of what?"

"I paid a visit to Joliet once."

"Ah, what of it?"

"Nothin', only we had a little schmonk on foot, and the warden got wind of it somehow. He didn't know enough to

him thoroughly, you know, but just high to make him want to know e."

Well?"

He probed me with questions till he e himself away, and so we just laid by a few months till he'd forgotten all it it; see?"

he warden did see.

le did not suspect the identity of the sus before him, but he was reminded, n whe clever story, that if he questioned Carge too closely the latter would take conning.

regle therefore contented himself with a nt u more questions which meant nothing osely particular, and then dismissed them ash.

They were placed under the charge of ly Piper, and a shrewder, keener guard you ver watched a convict at work.

The days began to creep past, and re-cted as they were, Budge and Happy d had very few opportunities for ex-angng confidences.

But Budge was in no hurry.

The few words spoken to him by the rden had set him to thinking, and he olved to bide his time.

In the meantime, by the method taught Happy Hal, the two convicts found ay opportunities of conversing.

Without being too literal we will give conversation between them one day en they had been in prison about a eek

It was begun by Happy Hal, and was egraphed to Budge, who answered it h the same manner.

so "I have fixed Tom," was the first sen- nce.

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Does he know the system?"

he "Yes."

of "Have you taught anybody else?"

gh "No."

"Is he well enough posted to talk with me?"

"Yes."

"Good! I will try him when I get a chance."

Nick was delighted.

As yet Budge had said not a word about the plot that the detective knew brought him there.

But by using the system of signaling which Nick had invented for the occasion Budge would be obliged to take Happy Hal into his confidence from the very fact that the latter could understand every signal that was made.

On the following day Budge signaled to Nick.

"When you see me talk with Tom " he said, "watch."

"Why?"

"Do you remember what I said about a scheme of mine?"

"Yes."

"You will catch on when you read what I say to Tom."

"O. K."

"It's a big one."

"What kind?"

"Escape!"

"Oh!"

"Sure to succeed."

"Tough job here."

"Can't fail."

"Am I in it?"

"You bet!"

"You ought to have posted me sooner."

"Wanted to study you."

"Oh!"

"There's something in it besides escape."

"What?"

"Boodle."

"Where?"

"Not far away."

"Have you got friends outside?"

"You bet!"

"Ready to help?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"You'll know some time."

"Correct."

"I needn't have come here this trip."

"Get out!"

"Honest."

"Then why——"

"I came to carry out this scheme."

"Oh!"

"I knew I could escape."

"Ah!"

"So got nabbed purposely."

"You're a jay."

"Think so?"

"Yes. Any fellow who'd get nabbed purposely is a lunatic, a fool, or a jay."

"All right. Watch me when I signal Tom."

"Will you do it to-day?"

"No; to-morrow."

"O. K."

The man whom they referred to as Tom was in face and physique the last person whom a beholder would take for a criminal.

He was slight of build, his face was refined, his eyes clear and strong, and everything about him denoted a man of high character rather than one who would commit the crime for which he was imprisoned—highway robbery.

When Nick first saw Tom he fancied that there was something familiar in the convict's face, but although he concentrated his mind upon the thought he could not recall the time, place, and circumstances which the glance of Tom's clear eyes brought to mind.

"I will remember it all in good time," thought the detective, and waited.

The day following the conversation above quoted between Nick and Budge the detective was on the watch to catch every word that might be signaled between the forger and Tom.

The information that he wanted, that Nick had risked so much to gain, was about to become his.

It was afternoon before Budge and Tom had a chance to communicate.

Then, without a moment of unnecessary delay, Budge opened the "ball."

"Can you understand my signals?" asked of Tom.

"Yes."

"Perfectly?"

"Yes."

"I have a great deal to tell you."

"Fire away."

"You know I couldn't do anything when I came to see you."

"Yes."

"Piper watched me too closely."

"Yes."

"He's watching now; see him look"

"Yes."

"He can't get onto this racket. That fellow who taught it to you taught me"

"I know it."

"I came here on purpose to fix things"

"How?"

"Forged a check, got the cash, turned the money over to Jim, let myself be nabbed, pleaded guilty, and here I am"

"Well?"

"I'm not going to stay."

"How can you help it?"

"Bah! Do you think I came up here on a seven-year trip for fun?"

"No."

"Not much."

"What are you here for?"

"For liberty."

"It's a queer place to look for it."

"There are five fellows here whom I want."

"Who?"

"You are one."

"Yes."

"Jem Green's another."

"Yes."

"Bob Dixon, Bill Foster, and Bill Thompson."

he wanted, Nick Carter, who had not lost a word, came near uttering an exclamation of astonishment.

He believed that he saw through the whole scheme then and there, for he knew the names and reputations of the men named by Budge.

Jem Green and Bob Dixon were the most expert counterfeiters in the world.

They were both up for long terms, and there were other indictments awaiting them when they should be liberated from the sentence they were then serving.

They knew, the authorities knew, everybody who was familiar with their exploits knew that there was no hope that they could ever be liberated.

One sentence would follow another as fast as they were served out, and the two men would have to live to be over a hundred years old apiece to pay the penalties already incurred.

Bill Foster and Butch Thompson were as expert as the other two in their own way.

They were cracksmen of an advanced degree.

They were men who had reduced the "profession" to a fine art, and they also had several indictments pending against them.

Should all hold good forty years would find them convicts still.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOT UNFOLDS A LITTLE.

There was yet another fact regarding these four men which was equally well known to the detective.

When Jem Green and Bob Dixon were arrested, it was known that they had succeeded in passing over two hundred thousand dollars' worth of counterfeit money.

Later, another hundred thousand was traced, so it was safe to assume that they

had nearly a quarter of a million dollars in good money concealed somewhere.

The hiding-place neither would reveal, of course, but that they had it, and could find it if liberated was almost positively known.

With the number of indictments that were hanging over them, together with the fact that they would probably have to spend the remainder of their lives in prison, it was more than likely that they would cheerfully give up every dollar of their hoarded fortune to procure their liberty.

Indeed, soon after their commitment, Jem Green had offered one of the guards the entire amount if he would help them to escape.

But the guard was Billy Piper, and Billy was invulnerable.

He had simply reported the matter, and the two convicts received nothing but punishment for their attempt to bribe a guard.

Something of the same condition of things existed in the cases of Bill Foster and Butch Thompson.

They had before the burglary, at which they were caught robbed a bank in Leavenworth, and had succeeded in extracting over a hundred thousand dollars in cash from the vaults, besides twice as much more in negotiable bonds.

Many of the bonds they had succeeded in "placing."

When finally arrested every effort had been made to force them to reveal the hiding-place of their money, but they had only snapped their fingers at the requests and accepted the inevitable.

But they knew where the money was, and it was a very large amount, upward of two hundred thousand dollars, all in good, legal-tender cash.

The reader begins to see through the method of the man "Jim" of the lumber pile.

Jem Green, Bob Dixon, Bill Foster and

Butch Thompson could and doubtless would pay the immense sum of half a million dollars for their liberty.

"Jim" knew it, and resolved to earn the fee by liberating them.

He laid his plans, engaged Jack Lawless and Polly—whoever they were—and Budge to aid him.

Such was the scheme which the detective believed he had discovered, when he read the names of the men it was proposed to liberate, through the signals that were passing between Budge and Tom.

But why Tom?

Why had he been selected as one who was to be liberated?

The detective could find no answer to that question in his memory.

Tom was a stranger to him—an unknown quantity.

Altogether there were six to escape, according to the scheme as Nick believed he understood it.

Six meant sixty or more, doubtless, for others would have to be let into the secret; and Nick believed that he was on the eve of the discovery of the most stupendous plot of prison-breaking in the history of this country.

"I must have your help," was the next message signaled from Budge to Tom.

"O. K.," was the answer.

"There will be seven of us in all."

"Yes."

"The five named, Happy Hal, and myself."

"Yes."

"Jim and Jack work the outside part of it."

"Oh!"

Nick saw the suspicion of a smile upon the face of "Cousin Tom" when he signaled the word "Oh!" and the detective wondered what had caused it.

"What is the scheme?" was the next signal made by Tom.

"The days are getting shorter."

"Yes."

"You know Jim's hobby?"

"Yes."

"He uses that."

"I'm afraid it won't work."

"It can't help it."

"I'm willing to aid all I can."

"O. K. You must pass the word to Jem, Bob, Bill and Butch."

"How?"

"Get a chance to teach them this code."

"Well?"

"Then get their promise."

"O. K."

"You have more chance with them than I."

"Yes."

"Besides, they know you and will place faith in what you say. If you tell them you can get them out, they will believe you."

"O. K."

"They must promise to give up the boodle."

"Yes."

"All but ten thousand apiece."

"Correct."

"You are to get twenty thousand, I the same, and the rest goes between Jack, Jim and Polly."

"You ought to have more."

"Why?"

"For taking this risk."

"Jim'll look out for me."

"That's so."

"Get to work as soon as you can. Time flies."

"I will."

"Tackle Jem Green first; he's the shrewdest."

"O. K. I wish I knew more about the scheme, so I could tell them better."

"I will post you when I can. There isn't time to-day."

"That's so."

"All you need tell them for a starter is that we have got a scheme to liberate them."

"Yes."

"That it's bound to work."

"Yes."

"That I am so sure of it that I came here voluntarily on a seven-year sentence."

"Yes."

"That you and Jim and Jack are working it."

"Yes."

"That they've got to agree to give up the boodle as I have said."

"Yes."

"And that they can take as many others into the scheme as they please, provided they are sure of their men."

"Right!"

"As far as we are concerned, we won't take anybody except the ones in it now, unless they say so. The scheme's for their benefit and yours."

"O. K."

"You might say that Happy Hal is one of our men; he is."

"Since when?"

"Oh, a month or two!"

"In Jim's confidence?"

"Partially."

"O. K. That answers for him. Jim never was fooled in a man yet."

"Have you got any friend here whom you want in it?"

"No."

"Well, we'd better quit now."

"Wait. How's Polly?"

"Fine."

"Does she miss me?"

"Miss you! She's been punching us up to this thing ever since you got here."

"I thought she would."

"We would have done it, anyway, for your sake."

"I expected it."

"But we've got a chance at the boodle in the same haul, and having four such fellows as the counterfeiter and the cracksmen makes it easier."

"Of course."

"Hal's no slouch, either."

"No."

"Billy Piper is watching us. Let's quit for to-day."

"O. K."

The reader must not suppose that the signaled conversation above quoted took place as it is written.

Signs represented words, and the intelligence filled in many gaps left blank in the gestures.

Again, if it had been possible for the men to have conversed only a few moments would have been occupied in the exchange of ideas.

As it was, the entire afternoon was consumed in the signaling.

Sometimes many minutes elapsed after a question had been asked before an answer could be given.

Again, following an answer, it might be a quarter of an hour before the next question came.

But to a convict, hours count for nothing.

A month is a mere interval of time, a day but a brief space.

To possess a system by which they can converse intelligibly is to them a boon indeed, and it does not matter if hours pass between the asking of a question and the transmission of its answer.

To go to prison is to be buried; to be

released is to be resurrected from the dead, but into a new world from which confidence in human nature has been eliminated.

Everybody looks upon an ex-convict with suspicion; the police watch him.

If a crime is committed in his particular line, he is harassed and questioned until driven to commit another himself.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ESCAPED CONVICT.

During the time that we have been obliged to pass over in following Nick Carter in person, Chick had not been idle.

Nobody except Superintendent Byrnes and District Attorney Nicoll suspected that Nick was absent from home, for Chick personated him on every occasion when it became necessary to do so.

New cases were constantly being brought in, which it became necessary to decline, for Nick was away, and Chick was busy.

Following the instructions of the detective, he spent his time in watching Judson Leonard.

The more he watched him the more puzzled he became.

Leonard was a mystery which was hard to solve.

In reply to the inquiries sent by Chick to Havana, N. Y., the information had come that formerly there had been two young men bearing the names of Judson Leonard and Benjamin Farrel, who had been residents of that place.

But they had left there many years ago, and nothing had been known of them since.

So far the story that Leonard had told at the bank seemed to be substantiated.

Several times Chick was on the point of believing that Leonard was "right," and that he was solely a victim of circumstance.

But each time, just as he had about made up his mind to that belief, he discovered something which led his idea upon the other tack.

Leonard frequently visited a house on Twenty-first street.

When he went there, it was invariably in the early evening.

Upon every occasion, he did not leave the premises until the following morning—a fact which made Chick wonder.

Careful inquiry in the neighborhood gave the house and its inmates an excellent reputation.

Judging from what was said, and that the assistant detective could observe the character of the people who lived there was irreproachable.

Chick could learn nothing upon which to base a suspicion, if it were not for other circumstance.

Twice he had sent a messenger boy to the door of the house after he had seen Leonard enter it.

The boy had been instructed to inquire for Mr. Judson Leonard, and both times he had been told that the gentleman was not there.

One night Chick had placed Patsy on the watch after Leonard had gone from the house, and had, himself, gone to the next street—Twentieth—and had watched

many years known which Leonard had entered.

He had seen several people come out of different residences, and one of them a man—he had followed.

Except that he was about the same stature as Leonard, and walked like him, there was no resemblance.

The stranger walked to Fourth avenue, that thoroughfare to Twenty-third street, thence east to Third avenue, and when Chick reached the corner around which the stranger had passed, he had disappeared.

The assistant remembered, then, the experience which Nick had met with when shadowing "Jim," after the incident of the lumber pile.

"Is the man whom I have followed here Jim?" Chick asked himself.

He waited, resolved to see his man come out, and to take his track again, if it took all night.

It did, nearly.

Daylight was not far away when the stranger again appeared.

Again Chick took the track.

The stranger returned to Twentieth street, entered the house that he had left the evening before, and close the door.

Chick hastened to Twenty-first street.

Patsy was still at his post.

"Seen anything?" asked Chick.

"Nothing."

"Well, come away; we won't watch any longer now."

But the next time that Leonard went to the house in Twenty-first street, Chick adopted different tactics.

He set Patsy to watch the house in Twentieth street, and himself hurried to

Third avenue and Twenty-third street and waited.

In due time he saw his man—the same one whom he had followed before.

He saw what doorway he entered, and the appearance of Patsy, a moment later, proved that he had not been mistaken in the identity of the fellow.

"It's my belief," mused Chick, "that the man 'Jim' and Judson Leonard, are one and the same, and therefore the woman who lives in the house in Twenty-first street must be Polly."

"God. Now, I'll find out who lives in Twenty-second street."

He did.

"A gentleman named John Lawler," said his informant; "a very pleasant gentleman he is, too, although he is seldom at home."

"Ah! travels, eh?"

"Yes."

"What business?"

"Wholesale liquor house, I think."

"Have you met him often?"

"Not very; but I would vote him a nice fellow."

"Thanks."

Chick walked away.

He had told the man a feasible story to account for his desire to learn about Mr. Lawler, and he was convinced that the information that he was inquiring about would not be likely to reach the object of his questions.

Suddenly he paused in his walk, and uttered an exclamation.

"By Jove!" he muttered; "I never thought of that."

Then he took an envelope from his

pocket, and wrote down the following names one underneath the others.

"Jim."

"Jack Lawless."

"Judson Leonard."

"John Lawler."

"Strikingly alike, those names," he mused, viewing them critically, "and the same initials stand for all except that there is no 'L' that goes with 'Jim.'"

"Humph! 'J. L.' Ah!"

A sudden idea occurred to him, and he resolved to act upon it at once.

He hurried home and found Patsy there.

"Patsy," he said, "I'm going out of town this afternoon, and you've got to do my work."

"I'm ready."

"Shadow Leonard. Don't lose his track. Follow him, if he goes—er—to the devil."

"I will."

"Right, my boy. I'm off."

Chick hurried to the depot.

He caught a train for Sing Sing, and at once repaired to the prison when he reached the town by the river.

Warden Brown received him at once, for he sent in a card which bore the name of Nick Carter.

"How are you, warden?" said Chick. "I am not Nick Carter but his assistant. You have heard of me, doubtless."

"Mr. Chickering Carter, eh?"

"Precisely."

"What can I do for you?"

"I'm chasing up a fellow who has a dozen aliases."

"Most of 'em have."

"I have reason to believe that this fel-

low was once a boarder here, though I haven't the least idea."

"And you wish to look the record over, I suppose?"

"Yes, if you will permit me."

"I'll do more; I'll help you."

"Awfully kind of you, warden."

"Tell me some of those aliases."

"'Jim,' 'John Lawler,' 'Jack Lawless—'"

"Hold on."

"Well?"

"Did you say Jack Lawless?"

"Yes."

"Wait."

The warden went to the records and presently brought down a book, which he spread open upon his lap.

After turning the leaves several moments, he paused and said:

"Listen, and see if this sounds like your man."

"Go ahead."

"'Age, twenty-nine'—that is, six years ago."

"Go on."

"We'll begin again, and say: 'Age, thirty-five. Occupation, clerk in bank. Complexion, dark. Eyes, black. Brows, black and ached. Hair, black. Stature, five feet six and a half inches. Weight, one hundred pounds. Can read and write. Habits, moderate. Uses tobacco. Protestant. Single. Resided when arrested at No. — East Twenty-second street, New York. Forehead, broad and high. Face, handsome. Feet and hands, small. Fingers, tapering. When thinking deeply squints perceptibly. Mole on back of neck under collar. Steps quickly and lightly. Two front teeth in upper jaw

filled with gold. Nose rather long and straight. Deep dimple in chin. Hair curls slightly over temples. Shoulders——”

“That will do, warden.”

“Have I hit it?”

“Yes; what was he in for?”

“Forgery and embezzlement.”

“How long?”

“Five years only.”

“Ever heard of him since?”

“No. queer thing about him, too; he escaped.”

“Escaped!”

“Yes. Under my predecessor in office, mind you. Worked a neat trick, and got away. His time was nearly out, too. He had only one more year to serve.”

“He’s my man, warden.”

“Do you know where to find him?”

“Yes.”

“Then we’ll nab him again.”

“We will, sure.”

“Good! Now, what more can I do for six you?”

CHAPTER X.

BREAKING PRISON.

“Warden,” said Chick, when they had finished the inspection of the records, “you’ve got a man here who could tell me some things about Lawless that I would like to know.”

“Who is he?”

“A burglar called Happy Hal.”

“Do you want to see him?”

“Yes; if you will have him brought out.”

“Sure! Come with me.”

Fifteen minutes later Nick Carter and his assistant stood face to face in the consultation room.

The warden was present, and therefore Chick was very guarded in what he said.

“Hal,” he began, “you once had a pal named Jack Lawless, didn’t you?”

“Well, what of it?”

“He was sometimes called Leonard, sometimes John Lawler, and also Jim.”

Nick’s eyes glistened. He “caught on.”

“Where is he now?” continued Chick.

“How in blazes do I know?”

“We know that he escaped from here long ago, and we want him again.”

“Well, I ain’t got down to givin’ my pals away yet.”

“Oh, haven’t you?”

“No; but say.”

“Well?”

“He sorter played it on me once. I’ll think it over. You stay here till to-morrow night, and I’ll give you my answer, then. No; day after to-morrow, in the morning.”

“Can’t you tell the warden for me?”

“No; I’ll tell you or nobody.”

“Very good.”

Happy Hal was taken away, and Chick and the warden returned to the executive office in the warden’s house.

Both detectives understood each other.

Chick had managed to convey information which he knew the detective would like to hear, and Nick had warned his assistant of the time when the escape was to be attempted.

The warden seemed glad to entertain Chick, particularly as the latter promised him that he should have Jack Lawless back again, and so the following day passed and the shadows of the eventful night began to fall.

The prisoners had been, as usual, hard at work all day, and they were marched to their cells when the day's work was done, according to the every-day custom.

After they are locked securely in their tomb-like retreats, all danger of an outbreak seems past, and the vigilance of the prison guards relaxes in proportion as the security increases.

But the guards did not know "Jim's hobby," referred to in a signaled conversation between Budge and Tom.

Jim was a talented individual, who boasted that he could make a key for any lock that he had ever seen.

The day of Chick's arrival at the prison was visitors' day, and an emissary of "Jim's" had been there.

Just how he accomplished what he did, and who he was, will never be known, for the men could not be forced to confess.

That he "got there," however, the sequel will show.

Night settled down and all was quiet about the prison.

Chick, however, was restless.

He knew, from what Nick had said, that the trying time was at hand. He had not warned the warden, because he knew that Nick would have signified the desire to have him warned had he felt it.

The assistant only waited. He went to his room and put out the light; but he did not take off his clothing, for he felt that he had need to be dressed and ready for an emergency.

Midnight came and passed, and still no sign.

One o'clock and all was well.

Two.

Chick could bear the suspense longer.

He left his room in the warden's hotel, passed silently through the hall, down the stairs, and out into the night, remembering, however, in the shadow of the building, where he could not be seen by the guards.

Two-thirty.

The assistant began to think that he had misunderstood Nick, after all.

Suddenly, however, from the direction of the prison, he heard a noise which startled him like an electric shock.

It was a cry of pain, loud, piercing fell—

Instantly Chick leaped toward the prison doors.

But even as he ran, he heard a commotion in the house of the warden.

It connected with the prison, of course, and it was through that door that the convicts attempted to escape.

Suddenly there was a loud crash.

He heard the noise of a falling door.

It was followed by loud cries, curses, and shouts, and an instant later a swarm of men in striped uniforms rushed through the house and tumbled in haste from the front door into the air.

At the same instant the alarm bell began to clang, shots were fired by the guards, and men rushed from every quarter to assist in quelling the riot. The warden, half-dressed, leaped from a window of his house to the ground, and the scene became one of utter confusion.

As though to light up the scene the moon at that instant passed from be-

suspense and shed its flood of yellow glow
 them.
 t even as they all rushed forward,
 guards to prevent the escape and the
 icts to get away, a most unexpected
 occurred.
 ne of the convicts, the foremost,
 ed and faced the others.
 is arms seemed like animated batter-
 rams, his fists like metal projectiles.
 le was attacking his own companions
 nd what an attack it was.
 le was ten, ay, a dozen men in one.
 le leaped from point to point with the
 ckness of lightning.
 Every time his fist shot forward a con-
 fell—and fell to lie where he had
 toward en, stricken—senseless by the force of
 terrible arm.
 ard a com “It is Happy Hal!” shouted the war-
 den. “At ’em, Hal! You’ll get your par-
 on, of cou for this.”
 oor that The guards were superfluous.
 The guns were not used.
 crash. Chick was also in the thick of the fight,
 nding by Nick’s side and striking
 lling door blow after blow with his terrible
 cries, cur length.
 ater a sw Nick, although in the garb of a con-
 rms rus ct, was all officer now. His blows fell
 umbled in te rain upon the escaping prisoners’
 into the o ads.
 arm bells The convicts were struggling for lib-
 red by ty, and they fought like tigers.
 every q But they were no match for the “Little
 riot. ant.”
 from a v One by one they went down. One by
 nd, and e they were vanquished.
 fusion. The fight was fierce while it lasted, but
 e scene, ten minutes it was over.
 from be The guards rushed forward, the escap-

ing convicts were crowded back into the
 doorway, through it, into the hall, and
 on until the prison door closed behind
 them again.

Just as victory became an assured
 thing, a figure rushed toward Chick.

It was Patsy.

How he got there was a mystery.

He whispered a few hasty sentences in
 Chick’s ear, and then they dashed away
 together.

But not until Chick had leaped to the
 warden’s side, and hastily whispered:

“Do me a favor. Keep Happy Hal out
 of the prison till I return.”

“Where are you going?”

“I’ll be back in thirty minutes with
 Jack Lawless.”

Then he turned and dashed away.

The warden had Happy Hal taken to
 his office.

“Now, Ninety-nine, explain yourself,”
 he said.

Nick smiled.

“Explain what?” he asked.

“If you had not fought your compan-
 ions, you would have escaped, all of you,
 I fear.”

“I think so.”

“Then why did you fight them?”

“Because I didn’t want them to get
 away.”

“I can’t understand it.”

Nick stepped forward, so that he was
 out of ear-shot of the others.

“Warden,” he said, in a low tone. “I
 am Nick Carter. Be careful. Don’t let it
 be known. Let me be pardoned in the
 regular way. Byrnes will attend to it;
 Byrnes and Nicoll.”

“If I send you back there, those fellows

will kill you," said the warden, when he had recovered from his surprise.

"Arrange it to suit yourself, warden. You don't more than half believe me, do you?"

"No."

"Telegraph to Byrnes."

And the warden did.

Twenty minutes later Chick and Patsy returned.

Between them walked a man who was handcuffed, and a glance revealed the handsome face of Judson Leonard.

He had fought like a tiger, but taken by surprise, the two assistants had overpowered him.

He was on hand to aid his friends in securing the money from Jem Green, Bob Dixon, Bill Foster and Butch Thompson.

It was found that he was Jim, Jack Lawless, John Lawler and Judson Leonard, all in one.

The woman, Polly escaped, and has never been heard of since.

She was Jack Lawless' sister, and the wife of "Cousin Tom," who owned the house in Twenty-first street.

The expeditions to Third avenue were only to collect the moneys from a farobank owned by Lawless.

Budge was a mere tool.

He did not know that Jim, Jack, and John were one and the same, but believed them to be different individuals. That is why "Cousin Tom" smiled.

The denouement come just in time.

Lawless, as Leonard, had already become engaged to Simon Duncan's daughter.

The scoundrel would have married and then—but why speculate.

Nick was released in due form, body but the initiated suspected great detective had played the convict.

But for Nick Carter the plot have succeeded; but he stopped because a storm drove him to seek in a pile of lumber.

[THE END.]

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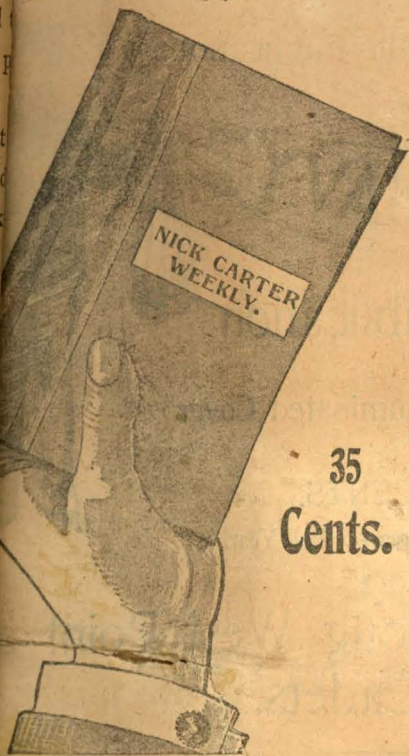
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